

BLM News

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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2006 Pre Fire Season #1

PREPARING FOR FIRE SEASON 2006

Fire season 2006 has the potential to see several large wildfires in Northeastern Nevada similar to the 2005 season.

“The most recent 2006 fire season forecast indicates higher than normal temperatures and above-normal fire potential for portions of the Great Basin,” said Elko Interagency Dispatch Manager Bill Roach. “One of the key components to a big fire season is the amount of fuel there is to burn. Where we normally measure cheatgrass and annual vegetation fuels in the hundreds of pounds per acre, in 2005 we measured them in tons per acre. This year, we have an even heavier fuels build up because of the wet spring and higher-than-average moisture levels. In addition, all the dead and dry fuel that didn’t burn in 2005 is still out there today.”

“One of our primary concerns with heavy vegetation is ‘fine fuels’ such as cheatgrass,” Roach continued. “When cheatgrass catches fire it is a fearsome thing to behold because of the speed and intensity of the fire growth. Even the swiftest-footed mule deer caught by the head of a wind-driven cheatgrass fire can’t outrun the flames, which often race across the landscape at speeds of 30-40 miles per hour.”

“Wildfires in this heavy fuel build up could result in erratic fire behavior. Suppression could be more difficult, especially if we have numerous fire ignitions. We definitely need the public’s help and cooperation with fire safety. We’re hoping to avoid fire restrictions and fire closures this year,” Roach added.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and fire fighting partners such as the Nevada Division of Forestry, U.S. Forest Service, and the more than 30 Volunteer Fire Departments in Northeastern Nevada are looking at a number of ways to protect communities including livestock grazing in green strips and/or mowing the green strips to increase their effectiveness.

“The key to everyone getting through this year’s fire season with life and property intact – is that everyone must practice fire safety every day,” Roach concluded. “Protecting property starts with every home owner.”

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Note to editors – This is the first in a series of 4 articles dealing with the coming fire season. Future topics in the series include the role of the public (use of burn barrels, etc.), creating defensible space, and things to think about and prepare if fire comes to your neighborhood.